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AUTHOR Hahn, Deborah K.
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ABSTRACT

This study has tried to provide answers for why 45% of American workers do not want to be promoted in the next 20 years. It was hypothesized that six determinants such as health, low income and job dissatisfaction are responsible for not wanting job promotion. Sex, age and race were hypothesized as determinants of worker's promotional expectations. A national probability sample of 1,159 employees were asked questions concerning their need for and expectation of promotion. Several multiple classification analyses were done and the following results were found: (1) the expectancy and need measures explained 46% of the variance in promotional desire; and (2) expectancies contributed much more to explained criterion variance than did the needs. However, since expectations could be measured with greater precision than could needs, it is possible that the complete contribution of needs to promotional desire is not accurately reflected by this study. (SE)

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Why Don't Workers Want To Be Promoted?*

Deborah King Hahn

Survey Research Center,
University of Michigan

Composite pictures of what workers want from their jobs have usually been drawn from importance ratings that workers give to various job facets, among these promotions. Most such pictures have shown that workers regard good promotional opportunities as very important (Herzberg et al., 1957; Jurgensen, 1948; Quinn, Staines, and McCullough, 1974). Despite this fact, the 1974 Manpower Report of the President indicates that nearly 45 percent of American workers do not want to be promoted, either now or at any time within the next 20 years.

The present study asked the question, "Why do so many workers not want to be promoted?" and attempted to explain the discrepancy between how important workers said promotions were to them and how much they actually wanted to be promoted. Using assumptions drawn from expectancy theory, it was hypothesized that an individual's desire to be promoted depends not only on the particular needs of the individual (as they are reflected in his or her importance ratings of job facets), but also upon his or her perception of the chances of ever being promoted in the first place.

To test this hypothesis a two-layer explanatory model was constructed, using as its dependent variable whether or not workers indicated that they ever wanted to be promoted. This model, shown in

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* This paper was presented at the 1975 annual meetings of the American Psychological Association.

the handout, distinguished at its first explanatory layer two basic concepts of expectancy theory: needs, or generalized predispositions to desire certain classes of outcomes; and expectancies, or perceived probabilities that these outcomes will occur. The model's second layer, designed to specify the determinants of both need and expectancy, was incorporated in order to make the model more relevant to alterable characteristics of work environments. The selection of variables for this second layer was guided by three questions. First, did available theory or previous research suggest the variable might be useful? Second, could the model be tested by the data available? Since this study was a secondary analysis of data collected for other purposes, the model's formulation was admittedly biased in favor of concepts for which measures were available. Finally, was the model consistent with what workers reported as the major sources of their desires not to be promoted or their expectations of not being promoted? Workers in this study who stated that they did not want to be or did not expect to be promoted had been asked to indicate their reasons for these statements. These reasons were especially helpful in defining the model's second-layer of predictor variables, which are shown in the left side of the handout.

Two economic conditions were hypothesized as determinants of a worker's need to be promoted: inadequate income and sizeable family responsibilities. The non-economic determinants were dissatisfaction with one's present job, low self-esteem, and the preference for a challenging rather than for a "comfortable" or "soft" job. Health was regarded as a limiting condition in that workers in poor health were not expected to want to be promoted; among workers who differed

only in terms of degrees of acceptable health, no association was anticipated between health and promotional needs.

Three basic categories of determinants of workers' promotional expectations were considered. The discrimination category included — sex, race, and age, with women, minorities, and older workers assumed to expect promotions less than others. Another category dealt with a worker's value to his or her employer. Tenure, the number of years the worker had been in the labor force, the worker's education relative to the education of his or her co-workers, and the worker's intelligence relative to that of his or her co-workers were included in this category. Included in a final category were measures of the availability of higher level jobs in each worker's employment context: the size of the worker's employing organization, the major industry group to which the worker belonged, and the major occupational group of the worker. Employment in large organizations and governmental organizations was expected to be associated with the greatest expectations of being promoted.

Method

The analysis was based on the responses of a national probability sample of 1,159 people who lived in households, were sixteen years old or older, worked for pay at least 35 hours per week, and were not self-employed. Measures were derived from data described by Quinn and Shepard (1974).

Most of the analysis relied on the technique of Multiple Classification Analysis, or MCA. This technique accomplishes the

same thing as conventional multiple regression analysis while allowing for a dichotomously scaled criterion and either nominally or ordinally scaled predictors (Andrews, Morgan, and Sonquist, 1967).

Three major MCA's were performed. The first predicted desire for promotion from need and expectancy. Desire for promotion was measured by a single question, "Approximately when would you like to take on a higher level job where you work?" The answers to this question were scored dichotomously: (1) the worker wanted to be promoted sometime within the next 20 years, (2) the worker explicitly said that he or she "never" wanted to be promoted or did not want to be promoted for at least 20 years. Similarly dichotomized were the answers to the expectancy question, "Of course the future is uncertain but approximately how many years or months do you think it will be before you are given a chance to take on a job at a higher level where you now work?" The need measure was based on the question, "How important is it to you in the kind of job you'd most like to have that the chances for promotion are good?"

The second major MCA predicted need (as measured by importance ratings) from the variables hypothesized to be determinants of need; and the third major MCA predicted expectancy from the variables hypothesized to be determinants of expectancy.

Additional MCA's and correlations were also performed to test (1) whether the determinants of need affect desire for promotion via their contribution to the importance ratings of promotion and (2) whether the determinants of expectancy affect desire for promotion via their contribution to expectancy.

Results

The first major MCA showed that the need and expectancy measures explained 46 percent of the variance in promotional desire, thus providing considerable support for the model. Expectancies were found to contribute much more to explained criterion variance than did needs, with betas of .63 and .12, respectively. Workers who expected to be promoted showed significantly greater desires to be promoted than did those who did not expect to be promoted, and workers who assigned the most importance to promotion had the greatest desires to be promoted.

The six variables chosen to predict how important promotion would be to workers only explained about four percent of the criterion variance. The best predictors of importance ratings were the adequacy of a worker's income, his or her family responsibilities, and how important having a challenging job was to him or her as opposed to having a "soft" job. Those workers with the greatest family responsibilities and the least adequate incomes assigned the most importance to promotion, as did those who wanted challenging jobs.

The third MCA revealed that the ten determinants of expectancy correlated quite highly with actual promotional expectations, yielding a multiple R of .51. Age and sex were the best predictors; younger workers had much higher expectations than older workers, and men had strikingly higher expectations than women. The size of a worker's employing organization was also a very good predictor of promotional expectations; the larger it was, the more likely workers

were to expect to be promoted.

Two additional MCA's were performed in order to clarify overall relationships among the model's components by answering two specific questions: (1) how much of the contribution that the six determinants of need made to desire for promotion was explained by their contribution to the importance ratings of promotion? (2) how much of the contribution that the ten determinants of expectancy made to desire for promotion was explained by their contribution to expectancy?

The term a_1 in Figure 1 represents the multiple correlation between the importance ratings and the set of six determinants of need; b_1 represents the association between the importance ratings and desire for promotion. The product of these two terms represents the effect of the six determinants upon desire for promotion explainable by their contribution to the importance ratings of promotion. C_1, representing the correlation between desire for promotion and the six determinants of need, expresses the total amount of direct effect that the six determinants had upon desire for promotion. Therefore, the ratio $\frac{a_1 b_1}{c_1}$ indicates the percentage of c_1 that is explained by $a_1 b_1$. Since $a_1 b_1 = .07$, and $c_1 = .38$, $\frac{a_1 b_1}{c_1} = .18$. Only 18 percent of the effect that the six determinants of need had upon desire for promotion was explained by their contribution to the importance ratings of promotion.

Repeating this process with respect to the expectancy half of the model (shown by a_2, b_2, c_2), it was found that 75 percent of the effect that the ten determinants of expectancy had upon promotional desire was explained by the contribution that they made to

promotional expectations.

Discussion

The results of this study have provided considerable support for the hypothesis that workers' promotional desires are determined not only by the workers' individual needs but also by their promotional expectations. These results suggest that a general model, incorporating both measures of need and measures of expectancy could account for most of the variance in workers' promotional desires.

The particular model of promotional desire presented in this analysis indicated that expectations were far better predictors of desire for promotion than were needs (i.e., relationship b_2 in handout was greater than relationship b_1). However, since expectations could be measured with greater precision than could needs, it is possible that the complete contribution of needs to promotional desire is not accurately indicated by these results. The measure of need, as it was obtained by importance ratings, was the weak link in the model's predictive chain.

In light of the frequent use of importance ratings to predict worker needs, motivations, and desires, the fact that there were poor measures of need in this study is troublesome. It suggests that we may too uncritically have assumed that importance ratings reliably measure certain motivational processes. Perhaps more work should be directed toward determining what importance ratings really indicate: what kinds of reliable information do they provide? what limitations do they have? how susceptible are they to a social desirability effect?

and finally, how valid are they as bases upon which to implement and justify organizational change?

The large effect of expectancies upon promotional desire revealed by the model suggests that a main reason so many workers do not want to be promoted is that they do not believe they are going to be promoted. Any number of psychological theories might be invoked to explain why workers tend to so "accommodate" their aspirations to their expectations but an explanation based upon dissonance theory seems particularly appropriate. That is, workers adjust their occupational aspirations in such a way that they are consistent with what the workers perceive as the realities of their occupational opportunities. In this way workers may avoid extreme job related frustrations.

This "accommodation" tendency has an obvious implication for business people and policy makers: in order to raise the promotional aspirations of workers they must first allow the workers to look forward to better career opportunities. Based upon the data from this study, such efforts should be particularly directed toward older workers, and women workers, since they tended to view their chances of being promoted much more dismally than did others.

Two methods were suggested by the study data as potentially useful in raising promotional expectations and aspirations: the institution and enforcement of affirmative action programs, and the establishment of clearly defined paths of career progression such as those used by governmental organizations. More systematic analyses of the costs and benefits of these two methods of raising workers' aspirations would seem to be warranted.

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